



SaltWater

Lane Ashfeldt

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'I still remember the sound effects of digital waves breaking on a two dimensional shore.' God Mode""I'm not thinking about the sea, it's just there, the way it always is.' Dancing on Canvey""SaltWater" is a collection of more than a dozen short stories inspired by the sea, as the title suggests. Set in a variety of coastal areas from Ireland to New Zealand, the stories are often inspired by real events, both contemporary and historical. Included in the selection are several stories that have been shortlisted or have won fiction prizes: "Catching the Tap-Tap to Cayes de Jacmel" winner of Global Short Story Prize, UK"Dancing on Canvey" winner of Fish Short Histories Prize, Ireland"SaltWater" shortlisted for HG Wells Prize, UK

SaltWater Details

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Ev Bishop says

This collection of short stories, connected loosely by a saltwater motif that seeps through each narrative, was lovely to wade through. Ashfeldt has a way with sensory details and although the villages, cities, and oceans we visited were foreign to me, I felt she was familiar with, and emotionally connected to, each place.

I also appreciated how each story stood alone, yet characters from one place or time would show up in another. The last line of the book reads, “So calm and perfect they look as if nothing bad can ever touch them”—and that’s a good summary of my feeling after reading. Though Ashfeldt tackles some hard, sorrowful things—a sister drowning during what should be a celebratory evening, the unexplained disappearance of a lover, the sometimes confusing clashes of generations and cultures—the stories, like the sea itself, leave you with a sense that each individual we’ve met will carry on and survive, despite—or maybe even because of—what they’ve experienced.

Laura Wilkinson says

This is the second short story collection I’ve read this year that has blown me away. I read many more novels but Ashfeldt’s SaltWater is a reminder why I should explore the shorter form more often. It’s gorgeous. As the title suggests the stories are all concerned, in one way or another, with the sea: its pull, beauty and destructive capacity; its ability to transform and shape landscape, and people. And though there are floodings, drownings, and deaths in SaltWater, these are stories of endurance and survival, and, like the oceans, are inspiring and moving, their raw power masked by a superficial simplicity, as on a calm day. Favourites of mine were Dancing on Canvey, Catching the Tap-Tap to Cayes de Jacmel and Outer Banks Riptide, and I enjoyed the sly humour in Fishtank. In Dancing on Canvey a girl is left home alone caring for her siblings when a freak high tide washes their home away, while a hurricane devastates a North Carolina island in the longest tale in the book, Outer Banks Riptide. The passages when the hurricane hits and a young woman and a dog struggle to find safety having missed the evacuation calls are almost unbearably tense and so vivid I felt as if I was there with them. The finest description of a storm I’ve read. Two lost souls connect buried beneath the rubble of the cinema flattened by a tsunami in Catching the Tap-Tap to Cayes de Jacmel. This wasn’t the only story that brought tears to my eyes, though if I tell you why it’ll spoil it. Why not go and buy the collection and find out?

I bought SaltWater at an event discussing the short story form in Waterstones, Brighton. I wasn’t familiar with Ashfeldt’s work. I’ll certainly be looking out for more. Fab-u-lous.

Catherine McNamara says

I thought these stories were stirring, transporting and expert. Ashfeldt is a great story teller who plays with contexts, who understands the danger of water, its sucking salty tides. Her characters are lucid, varied and real, and the stories gel together, linked by water, linked by a common desire to move on, expand, taste other worlds. Some of the stories are open-ended and linger in the mind, while others clasp shut firmly with a

shuddering end. My favourite story was Fishtank, a light-handed and truly hilarious tale with crisp, real characters facing parenthood. Others such as Pole House set the heart and mind running down a grassy hill.

Claudia says

Ashfeldt has a very seductive prose style: spare, but not cold; lucid, but not clinical; clear, but not simplistic. This style lends itself perfectly to these stories, many of which are charged with drama and a strong undercurrent of emotion. It allows them to be told in a way that is startlingly real and honest.

Not a great short story reader myself, I read this collection in one sitting. The theme of the sea runs through it without obtruding. The stories ripple and echo, with no obvious links, although some characters from early stories reappear later on.

Ashfeldt demonstrates terrific range in her storytelling, in terms, not only of location (encompassing Ireland, Greece, New Zealand and Haiti to name but a few) but also in terms of period, both contemporary and historical; in the blending of fact and fiction; and in her characters' diverse age and experience.

She has an eye for the telling detail and a precision that makes things come alive. She also has an ear for dialogue and a keen instinct for the twists and turns and contradictions of human relationships.

Amongst my favourites is the opening 'The Boat Trip' in which disaster strikes out of nowhere, shocking in its interruption of everyday petty jealousies. 'Dancing on Canvey' deals with a real life disaster, an historic flood, and pays exquisite attention to real life preludes, such as the preparation in "Double Art class" of a poster depicting Dutch settlers safeguarding the land. 'Airside' gives three different perspectives on the significance of an iPod which gets mislaid on a journey home from Spain to England. 'Freshwater Habitat' follows a successful player of the London stock market on a trip back to his Irish homeland, alongside his sophisticated Japanese girlfriend, and the conflicting instincts and desires this occasions. 'Catching the Tap-Tap to Cayes de Jacmel' deserves a mention for the title alone.

Not surprisingly, Ashfeldt has stacked up a number of prizes for these stories. She has a rare commodity: a voice that is at once unique and versatile. I recommend giving it a try.

Mel says

Saltwater by Lane Ashfeldt (2013)

Saltwater by Lane Ashfeldt is a unique collection of short works of fiction, all inspired by the sea. Ashfeldt, born in London to Irish parents, understands as well as any writer I know of how a proximity to the ocean, can permeate the mind. It is as if next to your mundane limited life is something of great power and beauty which can destroy in a capricious or peevish moment. I think the Irish psyche has been deeply affected by the Island nature of the country and the proximity of the ocean. In Irish history, the ocean was the source of food, took people out of the country forever when times were bad, and was a wild power beyond human control. It is these impulses that Ashfeldt deals with in the amazing stories in Saltwater.

I will post on half of the stories in the collection then upon completing this I will attempt to say why I like Saltwater by Lane Ashfeldt so much.

" 'So, have you made your mind up yet?'
'About what?'
'About the boat trip on Sunday, what else?' "

"The Boat Trip", the lead story in the collection, is a perfect specimen of the short story tellers art. It is beautifully evokes the feel of living by the sea, something I have done. It also lets us see how dangerous the sea can be. It is very much about the eternal problem that anyone with teenagers (I have three teenage daughters) has. How do you gradually let them develop a sense of independence and freedom while protecting them from evils and dangers you see and they do not? There is a horrible sadness, the kind you will never escape from in this story. I will let you discover the plot for yourself. Ashfeldt does a perfect job of letting us see the sad development of a life time of pain and regret.

"Neap Tide"

neap tide n. A tide that occurs when the difference between high and low tide is least; the lowest level of high tide.

Before I read this great story about the tides that flow up and down in our relationships, I am pretty sure I had never encountered the term "neap tide". This a girl meets exotic beautiful man from a Greek Isle who to her represents everything Ireland (and I guess Irish men) is not. "When she fell for Panos, she had also fallen for his country--the endless sun, the golden siestas, the sparkly silver-blue Aegean. She wanted it all". He also sees her as different from the women he is accustomed to. I admit I did not much like him when he said he hated books. He comes across to me as a man that preys on tourist women. They are on a ferry from the U.K. (I think) to Dublin. She grew up in Dublin and her parents live there but she does not really know the city at all. When they are in Athens it is Panos that drives them around, back in Dublin he is her passenger. I think she begins to not seem different to him when he is surrounded by all sorts of other Irish women, he begins, for the first time, to bore her. We can see the relationship decline, the excitement is gone on both sides. Relationships built on titillation and novelty don't normally endure more than a few comings of the tides and this story wonderfully illustrates that point.

"Fishtank"

As the story opens we meet Sorcha during a prenatal examination in which she is viewing her baby on a sonogram for the first time. She is trying to feel maternal but she feels more dread than anything else. They are trying to get used to the baby idea while on vacation. We are with the couple as they go back to London. We listen in as they talk about the baby and we just know the woman is not happy. We know deep down if we go that far that all life came from the sea and the baby exists in kind of a sea for nine months before being born. The ending of the story is very complex and deeply evocative of many core myths.

"Pole House"

"Pole House" is set in Piha, New Zealand. Piha is a small beach community that is a major day-trip for people from Auckland. It is considered a place of great tropical beauty. The story is told by a woman, her age is hard to fix but she has grown twins, living in a pole house with a man who makes surf sculptures. A surf sculpture is made out of drift wood and the man does well selling his creations. She can hear the distant roar of the surf and has a glimpse of the ocean. Some days she walks down to the ocean but today she needs to get away. Kate was attracted to him because even though "He might be quiet and shy, but he not only planned up wild schemes, he created them. Lived them". Kate used to love the pole house (built up in the canopy of the rain forest but now it feels like a prison to her. We go along with Kate on her journey into the town, it is pretty much your standard beach community. She stops in at an internet cafe and she begins to talk

a man who works there, I think, about upgrading her laptop mobile internet. You can see she is enjoying talking to the man, semi-flirting with him but has no plans to take it further. "Pole House" is a great story about living in isolation in a strange house in a place of great natural beauty.

"Roaring Water Bay"

Most of the stories in the collection are 12 to 18 pages long. This remarkable story is only one page. It is about Auntie Rose, born in 1892 and just buried. It speaks deeply of the social mores of the era and place and I will leave it unspoiled. Like the other stories, it is very related to the sea.

There are seven other stories in the collection. The settings range from holidays in Spain, Grecian Islands and the west coast of England during WWII.

Saltwater is a beautiful collection of short stories, all tied in, each story in a different way to one of the primordial human symbols, the sea.

The collection is available as a Kindle edition (at a very fair price)

I endorse this collection of short stories to any and all lovers of the form. Her stories go all over the world from Ireland, Greece, England, Haiti and New Zealand. Ashfeldt has a lived experience of much of the places she writes about and it shows in her amazing stories,

World Literature Today says

"As a reader, I was unable to put this collection down. I was enchanted from the first line—'So, have you made your mind up yet?'—of Lane Ashfeldt's first story, 'The Boat Trip.' I was captivated, and the author kept me captivated until the last line of the last tale, 'Outer Banks Riptide': 'It is late into the night, that time after the moon is done when the stars burn brighter than ever, making little points of light in the still water ahead of her as well as in the sky above.'" - Janet Mary Livesey, University of Oklahoma

This book was reviewed in the January 2015 issue of *World Literature Today*. Read the full review by visiting our website: <http://bit.ly/1yEhsci>
